Comparative Political Economy of Work

[Selected Problems in Industrial Relations and Human Resources – 16:545:620]

SYLLABUS
Spring 2023

Class Meetings:
Prof. Tobias Schulze-Cleven
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Wednesday, 3:00 – 5:00pm
OH: by arrangement
Hybrid (via Zoom and in Room 166, Labor Education Center, 50 Labor Center Way)

Course Overview:

This doctoral-level course familiarizes students with cutting-edge research on the comparative political economy of work, labor, and education. Comparative political economy (CPE) is both a large subfield in (comparative) political science and a rich interdisciplinary space offering sophisticated concepts and tools for analyzing the political determinants of economic affairs across countries. Research on the comparative political economy of work is comprehensive, taking into account such topics as the evolution of market structures and company strategies, the development of welfare states, and the distribution of social risks. It has greatly increased our understanding of national differences and common trends, illuminating distributional conflicts and patterns of solidarity in the labor market, at the workplace, and even within the family.

The course begins with a review of theories on the governance of work and labor across advanced political economies. It then moves to cover contemporary challenges to these governance arrangements and examine the ongoing transformation of the institutions that societies rely on to manage the tensions between the realities of capitalism and the principles of democratic citizenship. Seeking to empower students to use CPE approaches in their own research, class discussions will highlight how scholars have conceptualized the drivers, processes, nature, and outcomes of institutional changes. Topics such as the evolution of worker power, policymakers’ embrace of social investment and education, the politics of the platform economy, and the future of work(ers) will receive particular attention.

Requirements:

This seminar is focused on discussing the readings for each week. In turn, effective participation requires students to spend sufficient time completing and reflecting on these readings before each week’s seminar. Thoughtful in-seminar contributions include critically assessing the weekly readings, raising questions for group discussion, and engaging with other students’ comments. All students are expected to share a few paragraphs of reading response for eight of our fourteen sessions. The length is up to you (and can vary from week to week), but 300-400 words should suffice. Each week, responses are due on Canvas by 9:00am on Wednesday.
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Beyond the reading responses, there is flexibility in the format of a longer writing assignment. Students have the option of 1) completing a final exam, 2) writing a research paper, or 3) doing a combination of a 10-page literature review and a 5-page research proposal. Class time will be provided for presentations of students’ writing projects. Topically, students should identify a (theoretical/empirical) question that has not been well resolved by existing studies and outline a theoretically informed empirical strategy to address this question.

Evaluation:

Class attendance and participation: 40 percent
Short responses: 20 percent
Long writing assignment: 40 percent

Readings:

Sets of assigned readings may be further adapted (including shortened or updated) to meet student interest and stimulate discussion. Core readings (and some from the “further reading” category) can be downloaded from the course website on Canvas. Readings listed under “further reading” are not required, and details about them are only provided as a service for students.

Overview:

PART 1: Foundations

Week 1 Introduction
Week 2 Democratic Capitalism
Week 3 Diagnosing Contemporary Crises and Challenges

PART 2: CPE’s Conceptual Repertoire

Week 4 Varieties of Institutionalism
Week 5 Institutional Change and Liberalization
Week 6 Aligning Ontology and Methodology

PART 3: Country Cases

Week 7 The United States
Week 8 European Parallels

PART 4: Focal Points for Analyses of “Knowledge Capitalism”

Week 9 Worker Power
Week 10 Gender, Immigration, and Social Investment
Week 11 Human Capital and Education
Week 12 The Platform Economy
Week 13 The Future of Work
Week 14 TBD / Presentations
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PART 1: Foundations

Week 1: Introduction (January 18)


Further Reading:


Week 2: Democratic Capitalism (January 25)


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Further Reading:


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Week 3: Diagnosing Contemporary Crises and Challenges (February 1)


Fraser, Nancy. 2016. “Contradictions of Capital and Care.” New Left Review 100 (July/Aug): 99–117. (skip if you are running out of time)

Táiwò, Olúfémi O., and Liam Kofi Bright. 2020. “A Response to Michael Walzer.” Dissent, August 7. (skip if you are running out of time)
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Further Reading:


PART 2: CPE’s Conceptual Repertoire

Week 4: Varieties of Institutionalism (February 8)


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Further Reading:


Week 5: Institutional Change and Liberalization (February 15)


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Further Reading:


Comparative Political Economy of Work


Week 6: Aligning Ontology and Methodology (February 22)


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Further Reading:


PART 3: Country Cases

Week 7: The United States (March 1)


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Further Reading:


Comparative Political Economy of Work


Week 8: European Parallels (March 8)


Further Reading:


Comparative Political Economy of Work


PART 4: Focal Points for Analyses of “Knowledge Capitalism”

Week 9: Worker Power – Cleavages and Collective Action (March 22)


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Further Reading:


Esping-Andersen, Gosta. 1999. “Politics without Class: Postindustrial Cleavages in Europe and America.“ In Herbert Kitschelt, Peter Lange, Gary Marks, and John D.
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Week 10: Gender, Immigration, and Social Investment (March 29)


Further Reading:


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Week 11: Human Capital & Education (April 5)


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Further Reading:


Comparative Political Economy of Work


Week 12: The Platform Economy (April 12)


Further Reading:


Comparative Political Economy of Work

Week 13: The Future of Work(ers) (April 19)


Further Reading:


Week 14: TBD / Presentations (April 26)